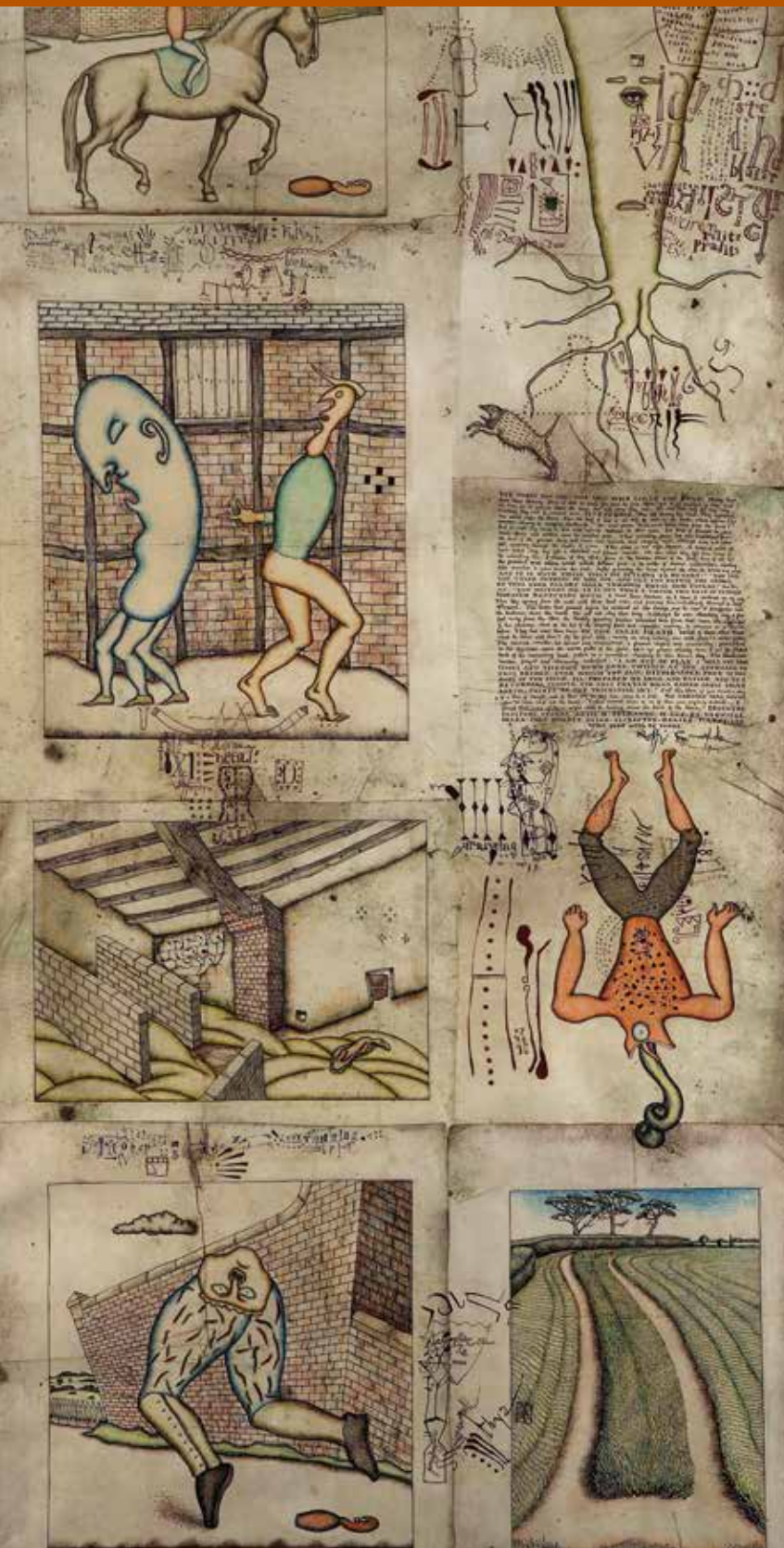


SIMON LEWTY

The
SIGNificance
of Writing

29 April - 10 July 2016



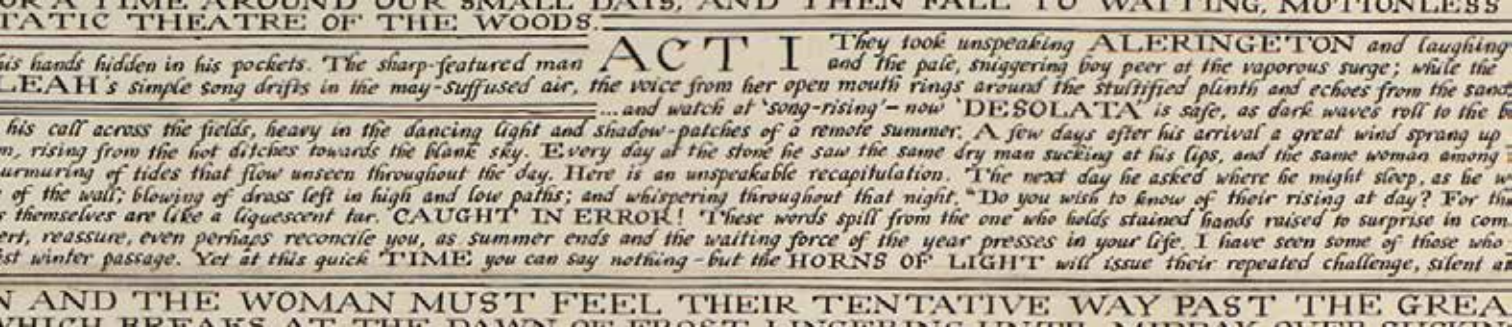
Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum
Royal Pump Rooms, The Parade,
Royal Leamington Spa, CV32 4AA
Tel: 01926 742700

www.warwickdc.gov.uk/royalpumprooms

The Men Who Lie In The Road (detail),
1991, ink and acrylic on paper, 220 x 107 cm

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

Innocence Speaks of Light in Ways, 2012, ink and acrylic on paper, 92.5 x 63 cm



To Unexplained Day, 2002, (Detail), Ink on paper, 100 x 143 cm

The SIGNificance of Writing IAN HUNT

'The dream is an intelligence of form that holds, moves, stimulates and shapes us. When I enter the world of dreams I am deconstructed, as I am transformed from the one who holds the internal world in my mind to the one who is experientially inside the dramaturgy of the other. Gathered and processed by the dream events, I live in a place where I seem to have been held before . . .'

Christopher Bollas,
Being a Character, 1993, p.13

The drawings by Simon Lewty assembled for this exhibition give viewers a chance to see the consistencies that run through his work over a period of almost five decades.

These include the significance of dreamwork, which has been both a direct source material for the artist

and also a deep formal analogy for his work. These drawings, manuscripts, images, graffiti and narrative fragments are exceptional in the way they convey the unexpected shifts of view in dream experience, and the complex dramaturgy of dreams – where we are held within a narrative that an inaccessible part of our minds is telling. Lewty's long-term commitment is not so much to dream-pictures on the surrealist model, but to complex modes of self-experiencing, of being both in and outside a represented event, story, place or time.

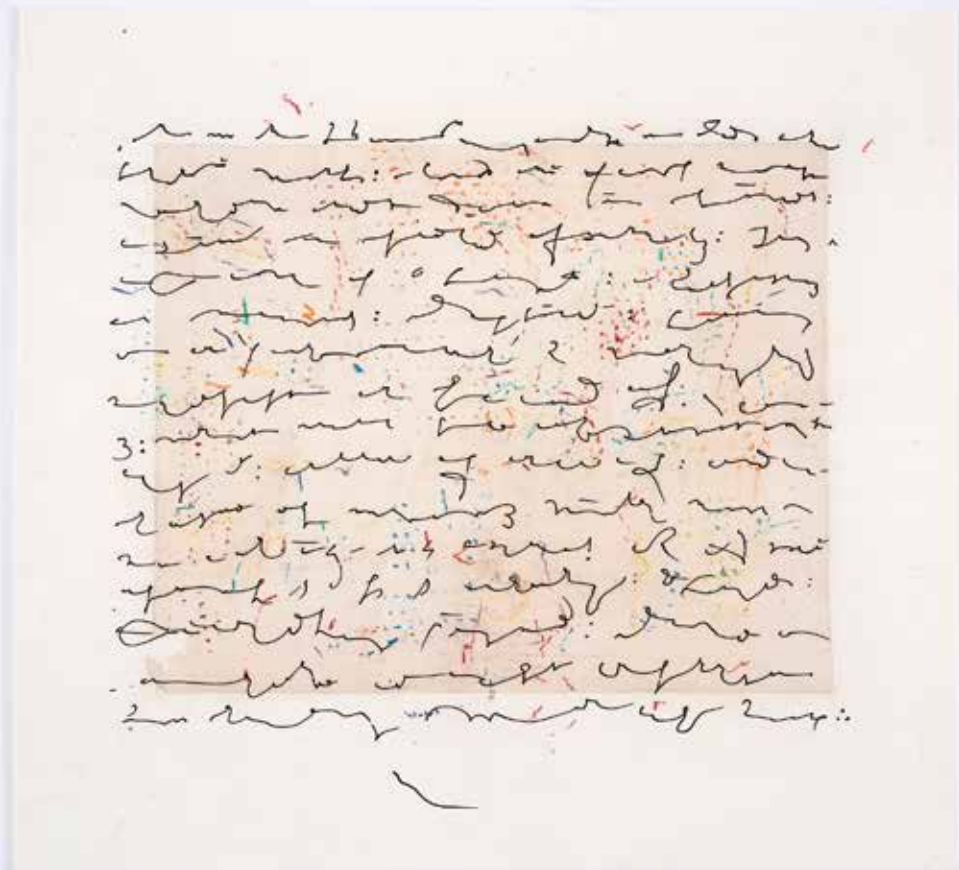
The Men Who Lie in the Road (1991, Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum) shows this clearly, and is also an example of a period of Lewty's work that remains best known. The peculiar tall format comprises a number of separate panels, and at the bottom right is a view of a field and what seem to be pine trees, traditionally planted as boundary markers. The view of the field is quite different in character to the other images. But we cannot be sure it is the end or conclusion of the story, or whether it comes 'before' or 'after' the other images showing built structures, roads, walls and a mandrake root.

The movement of the eye around the other panels follows the running legs (with no body on top, just a face) in a counter-clockwise movement, up to the horse and rider, a notional beginning point. Graffiti between and over the images adds additional complexities, suggesting that more than one author may be writing the story we still hope to find. Later works, from which image as such is no longer to be found, can work very similar effects simply from coloured script on a surface. The eye follows the strong habit of left to right consecutive reading, but circles back to the beginning, encountering disjunctions and repeated sequences, losing place and finding it again. It is a complex sense of relation to something inside and outside of oneself.

Lewty made an intriguing public statement in 1994, when he introduced a separate publication of his writings from Peter Larkin's Prest Roots Press: *'Cradles of the New* has the feeling of a tale, but the telling has been intruded upon, disrupted and overlaid. The characters echo the *dramatis personae* of my pictures: the mocker and the mocked, the staunch pilgrim, the old man, certain animals, "he" and "she". The

space of encounter. It may resemble a notary's agreement, summons, legal title or claim, written in a language we do not speak or read. It can be bluff and forbidding in its block-like arrangements of script, which our mind, seeking for points of contact, have to break into. It may be coded into historic forms of shorthand or handwriting styles that only palaeographers can read. But look again: Lewty's words can equally open out with almost complete limpidity, and the effect is like looking into a pool. The words frequently tell of everyday experiences, that are being related to us in as straightforward a way as possible. It is precisely in the shifts between obscurity and directness in his work that such unexpected power can be found. The knowing use of a language of VISION has the urgency of John Bunyan and other literature of revelation, but the experiences being processed are secular and familiar enough.

Looking at this work, it becomes apparent just how singular and remarkable Lewty's enterprise as an artist is. We are entitled to ask, what connection does it have to the wider currents of both art and culture in the period in which it has been made? Lewty's education and influences, and the complex ways in which his work was received in the 1980s as part of the figurative revival can only be hinted at here. (The testimonies, conversations and essays that can be found in the retrospective volume *The Self as a Stranger*, Black Dog Publishing, 2010, set out Lewty's development in more detail.) It can be stated, however, that the artist has both ploughed his own furrow and been strongly aware of contemporary developments of diverse kinds, from an



early enthusiasm for Dubuffet and Tàpies to land art and Joseph Beuys, through to discussions of the most innovative contemporary poetry and writing.

In some recent works, Shelton's 17th-century shorthand (or tachygraphy as it was first known – Lewty enjoys the connection here with the word *tache*, mark) is used to record the sound of waves. Can the sound of the sea be magically coded into script? Perhaps there is a hint here of the doctrine of signatures, which survives into our common era as a familiar childhood fantasy: that for each thing or phenomenon, there is, somewhere, a secret name.

When we describe someone as singular it is not always understood as

a term of praise, and it may be a polite way of saying that someone is rather odd. I mean it *strongly* as a term of praise, and suggest that Lewty's way of working and of involving us in his thinking and what we might call his 'world' – it is also ours – is an expert and original way of making us aware of what is unknown in ourselves. The singularity of Lewty's aesthetic thinking is as prominent in the work of the last twenty years, which is rightly emphasized by this selection, as it was in the first works by him that came to be widely exhibited in the 1980s. This is work that is not simply humming to itself but which also, without warning, SINGS.

